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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

JULY 1st, 1850.

CATHEDRAL MUSIC AND COMPOSERS.

No. III.

Contributed by E. HOLMES, Author of the "Life of Mozart."

MUSICIANS have been much perplexed to discover the ground of the encomiums bestowed by Milton and Waller on Henry Lawes, who is upheld to this time on the wings of Milton's charming sonnet, and is become immortal by having inspired immortal friendship. No one has called the poet in question for his bold anticipation—

'To after age thou shalt be writ the man
That with smooth air couldst humour best our tongue,'

though very little survives of the composition of Henry Lawes, and of that little, nothing conspicuous for melody. There is a good declamation of the words in the address to Echo in *Comus*, which Burney has preserved, but nothing more; and we have no warrant for the entrance of Lawes among composers as a "Priest of Phœbus quire," except the praise of Milton, which must be deemed sufficient. It has been suspected that this composer was a great favourite with the poets, not only on account of his "just note and accent," but from his purposely keeping the musical interest of his compositions subordinate to that of the poetry. When the harmonious sisters, "voice and verse," music and poetry, are united, their interests sometimes clash: that each should predominate at the same moment is not possible; and it may be considered a great step in our music when composers learned the true occasion of giving one or the other the advantage and superiority of attraction.

The madrigal composers appear to have gone elaborately in search of foolish words, and to have been most happy in setting *Fal la la*, or any other commodious vehicle of sound without meaning. Social harmony in its origin must have been a pleasure complete in itself; it certainly excited no disgust from the pastoral inanity of the literature with which it was connected. This music fulfilled its destiny and had its influence; the taste for it, we learn, began to decline before the Restoration. In spite of the beautiful remains of madrigal composition which modern performance has introduced to public notice, we are apt to think that a madrigal party of the age of Elizabeth or James would now prove more amusing to the eye than to the ear. We entertain in imagination a particular dislike of the effect of those performances in which gentlemen are said to have doubled their part on the viol, singing and playing at the same time—

whenever this scene represents itself to us. However we may admire the sociality of such a concert, which makes a good historical picture—and pictures of music always please, whether St. Cecilia touches the organ or plays the violoncello—the effect in practice must, we conceive, have been extremely barbarous. The English madrigal writers composing on a system, possess a considerable *joint stock* of fame; but their single names do not stand out with that powerful individuality which distinguishes others who have exerted themselves successfully in church music and that of the drama.

While the madrigal composers are praised in clusters, and Henry Lawes is fortunate in the voucher of a great poet, we turn with pleasure to names that have become as "household words" in English art, without other aid than their own intrinsic merit and originality. Lock survives with Shakespeare in that popular and admirable effort of his fancy which still gives so much delight whenever *Macbeth* is performed. A composition so admirable in the fairy way of writing, and which harmonizes delightfully with the spirit of the drama—to which, by prescription, it belongs—pleasing even after the works of the greatest modern masters, offers a great testimony to the merits of our English composer. Lock was certainly the model and precursor of Purcell in the turn of his melody, and must have been one of the first who introduced dramatic effect by contrasts of verse and chorus into church music. The construction of the anthem preserved in Boyce would seem to attest this; and though we hesitate in attempting to ascertain the precise contribution to improvement and progress rendered by any one master, we cannot be far wrong in giving to the inventions of Lock the highest distinction and award of originality. He was first in many things. It is said of his trios for violins, that "they were the first which furnished our stage with music in which a spark of genius is discoverable." His book on the art of accompaniment on keyed instruments, entitled *Melothesia*, published 1673, is supposed to be the first work of its kind on the subject. He was one of the chief composers in Davenant's "Entertainment in Declamation and Music" at Rutland House, an institution which, turning men's minds on truth of expression in the varied situations, affections, and sentiments of the lyric drama, greatly enlarged the scope of music, and promoted its advancement.

It is impossible to leave unacknowledged the influence of these early attempts in the poetry of the art, on the expression, character, and variety of our church music. The anthems and church music of Purcell, even merely in their declamation and accent, shew the practised hand of the dramatic musician, as much as the Requiem and

other masses of Mozart betray the tragic genius of the author of *Idomeneo* and *Don Juan*. The same imaginative treatment which produces emotion in the scenic representation of a subject, is the source of excellence and variety in the graver and severer style of the church. And though there is a *general* expression in all our older anthems from Tallis downwards, as indeed there is in our madrigals, it will be admitted that our cathedral music never had such interest or power over the hearer as when the anthem was released from the shackles of formality and precedent, and the text adjusted upon more natural and poetical principles of expression. This was the advantage which Purcell and his companions gained from the establishment of the musical drama, and their sacred compositions show in a lively manner the fruits of it. Pursuing musical expression with all the ardour and emulation of first discovery, consulting only the feeling which glowed within them, they struck out passages of harmony and melody which excite our wonder, for they are yet modern, and centuries may still elapse without quenching their divine fire.

In the arts, as in nature, a vacuum is abhorred. A man of genius indicates a want—a crowd of competitors rush in to supply it—and in a short time it is done so effectually, that nothing more remains to do. Such appears to be the sum of the history of vocal progress in England, as at the beginning of the 18th century it is of the dramatic music of Italy, in the career of Vinci, Pergolesi, and Galuppi. It is again illustrated in the sudden rise of the instrumental symphony to perfection under Mozart and Beethoven. But it seems to us even less wonderful that Purcell, who was born in comparatively favorable times for music, and brought up in the centre of a nest of singing birds, who excited each other in the highest degree by the mutual emulation of their song, should have accomplished what he did—than that Lock, whose life extended through a gloomy and troubled period, should have conceived in his state of solitude and discouragement ideas of so much elegance and expression as are to be traced in his works. The common and obvious are scarcely any more avoided than in the compositions of Lock; he possessed the lofty principles of the true artist—he combined the natural with the new in his strains, and it has preserved them to our time.

One of the last compositions of Lock was his music for the public entry of Charles II. On his portrait, which still subsists in the music-school at Oxford, Dr. Burney remarks that “without Lavater’s assistance, or adverting to his treatment of Salmon, (the author of a new scheme of notation,) and the asperity of his other writings, we are impressed with more than a suspicion of his ungentleness and want of urbanity.” As for

the want of courtesy to a literary antagonist, it was the fault of an age prone to such controversial onslaughts; and Lock was too far-sighted in his art, and saw that it had too much to do, to entertain impracticable projects with complaisance. As for any fancied acerbity or severity in his features, the time in which he lived may excuse it. A composer who blooms at a period when there is nothing for him to do, and who—cathedrals and theatres being for the most part closed—feels the whole scheme of his existence frustrated, is not likely to contract a very agreeable expression of countenance. But under whatever hard mask evil times and circumstances had concealed his true features, he still possessed within that “which passeth show”—the sensibility and feeling of the true musician. His compositions are an evidence of it. He was one of the first to lead us into the wild, untrodden regions of musical poetry. He first exhibited in a fanciful way the charm of unsophisticated melody, and the dramatic power of well-chosen and uncommon chords. The whole career of Matthew Lock marks him out as a very distinguished man, to whose original mind it seems that our country has not yet rendered a full account of her obligations. Chronology is well called the “eye of history.” Viewed by contemporary performance, the fame of this composer is secure: it will always appear that he could have done more than he did.

What a change had taken place when Purcell entered upon the scene! The cathedrals were restored to their wonted state, choirmen and organists were in full occupation, and composers in great request to replace what had been lost or destroyed during the ascendancy of the Puritans. It was an era of reconstruction that English musicians could never have been forgiven for had they let the opportunity pass unimproved. If we recall the date of the Restoration, 1649, and suppose the first attempts of Purcell in composition to have been made about 1670, when he was twelve years old, (and this can hardly be too early if we may credit the extraordinary history of the period,) it will appear that Charles II. had been full long enough in the quiet possession of his throne to vent safely that impatience at the sober style of the antique models of Tallis, &c., which for some years after his accession he prudently suppressed. Now the entertainment of the monarch was not to be suspended even during the offices of devotion. He liked no music but that to which he could beat time; and the organ not being well adapted to assist in this object, the French violins lent their aid. Hence the instrumental parts in numerous anthems of the time. We may imagine the pleasure with which he heard the celebration of his victories. Hundreds of Dutch burned or

Continued from page 20.

drowned at sea in the middle of the week, the news in town by Saturday, and a fine new thanksgiving anthem made ready by Sunday—picture the age, and the speed and zeal of Charles's servants, Humphreys, Blow, and Turner. Even Evelyn, as we learn from his diary, seems scandalized at the innovations and improprieties introduced into the service.

However, the encouragement bestowed in the smiles and affable demeanour of the king had their effect on the boys, of whom he in particular noticed the first set, educated under Captain Cook. Humphreys was sent to France, to improve under Lulli; and Michael Wise had the privilege of following the king in all his journeys through England as organist, and always took his seat in that capacity, wherever it might please his Majesty to go to church. Not one, however, of the young men of highest genius whom Charles distinguished next to his own French favourites, reached the ordinary age of man; and it would perhaps not be difficult to trace their premature death to some influence of that lax morality of which the court gave the example. The lives of young composers exhibit them generally as incapable of bearing prosperity with moderation.

As for Purcell, though some of his pieces show a great turn for conviviality, it is impossible that he can have been often excessive or tolerably constant in the Bacchanalian habits of the Restoration. The multitude of his works completed by his thirty-seventh year redeems his character; for it was never known yet that any artist indulging constant intemperance left many writings.

His career forms a remarkable counterpart to that of Mozart. It began amidst golden prospects, and terminated in clouds and discouragement. We have under his own hand the mild expression of his regret at the low state of the encouragement of music in his day. He composed on his death-bed, and had just finished his orchestral *Te Deum* for the opening of St. Paul's, when he departed; so strongly reviving in memory the circumstances of Mozart's requiem, that we may almost fancy the same events twice acted in history. No one has left us a graphic picture of Purcell. We must be content to gather from the encomiastic verses prefixed by his friends to his compositions how amiable and beloved he was. Love bids them speak; and their rude lines, while celebrating the charm he diffused by the union of his genius, his winning manners, and his engaging appearance, often come more home in the reading than the more laboured and polished panegyric of Dryden.

It is of these men of the English school that we speak with the more pleasure, because they

connect themselves with our own time after a lapse of nearly two centuries. Many of their experiments in harmony are reproduced in the most modern compositions; and one combination of Purcell, namely, the major third and minor sixth, which Dr. Burney pronounces jargon, actually forms one of the salient features of Mendelssohn's symphony to his beautiful cantata *The Hymn of Praise*; and there is scarcely one of Dr. Blow's "*crudities*" which is not a praiseworthy attempt to enlarge the scope of melody and expression; while many of them are more grammatically defensible than his critic seems to think. Music has become quite another thing since people bowed submissively to the theory of Dr. Pepusch.

(To be continued.)

ERRATA.

In the second quotation of music in our last from the Adagio of *Mozart's Quintet* in G minor, the signs of sharp and natural at the beginning of the second bar in the treble must be transposed. It should be F sharp and A natural.

For "bold harmony of thirds" read "*bald* harmony of thirds," in the line introducing the first quotation of music.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

D. B.—*The word "Soli" is used to signify that only one voice of each kind is to sing the passage over which it is marked. It is the opposite to "Tutti," which means that all the singers are to join. Soli may be considered the plural of Solo, and will apply to a duet, trio, quartett, &c., interspersed with a chorus.*

A. B. F., Horbury.—*The word "Programme" is used (musically) for a concert-bill. It means literally, "pre-writing of;" and it seems well-applied to describe the list furnished to the audience, of the music to be performed. We have seen the word thus used:—"Ministers are expected to state, on an early day, their programme of the measures to be brought forward this session." In Todd's edition of Johnson's Dictionary, the definitions are—1, a proclamation, or edict, set up in a public place; 2, what is written before something else; a preface. A fair definition of the word appears to be "a summary indication of what is to follow."*

The Rev. J. H. S.—*The anthem by Creighton, which you sent us so long since as January last, appears in the present number. We had hoped to give it earlier insertion.*

J. B., Hyde, near Manchester, will find the "*Elementary Compendium*" by Miss Elliot to combine what he asks for.

Reviews of New Music.

From the Dramatic and Musical Review, June 15.

NOVELLO'S PART-SONG BOOK. Edited by George Monk, Mus. Bac., Oxon.—If this publication does not meet with high encouragement, it will not be for want of zeal or talent on the part of the editor or publisher. Its objects are the encouragement of musical compositions of a choral description, adapted to words upon patriotic, social, and other popular subjects, such as harvesting, boating, cricketing, &c., but to the exclusion we believe of bacchanalian poetry. The first number of the work